

Message Text

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INFO ALL AMCONSULS CANADA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 OTTAWA 0030

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, CA
SUBJECT: LIBERAL REVERSAL IN SURPRISING GALLUP POLL RESULTS
RAISES QUESTIONS ABOUT TRUDEAU LEADERSHIP

REF: A. TORONTO 0026, B. 76 OTTAWA 5034, C. 76 OTTAWA 4962

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: MOST RECENT GALLUP POLL RESULTS, FIRST SINCE PQ VICTORY IN QUEBEC, HAVE SURPRISED POLITICAL OBSERVORS HERE. DOUBLING OF PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE (PC) LEAD FROM 7 TO 14 PERCENTAGE POINTS HAS STOPPED AT LEAST TEMPORARILY LIBERAL POLLING UP-SWING AND HAS FURTHER REDUCED THE POSSIBILITY OF SNAP NATIONAL ELECTIONS THIS SUMMER. IF THIS REVERSAL IS THE START OF A TREND, IT COULD CAUSE TRUDEAU TO ADOPT NEW POLICIES IN ATTEMPTING TO COUNTER PQ SEPARATIST THREAT. PC LEADER JOE CLARK MAY BE TEMPTED TO CONTINUE ESPOUSING DECENTRALIST THEME WITHOUT MANY SPECIFICS IN VIEW OF PC GAINS IN THIS POLL. THE POLL WAS NOT, HOWEVER, A COMPARISON OF TRUDEAU AND CLARK POPULARITY AND CLARK HAS INCREASINGLY BEEN CRITICIZED DURING THIS PERIOD FOR HIS "LACK OF STATUS" AS A NATIONAL LEADER. SURPRISING TURN IN QUEBEC WHERE PC TRAIL LIBERALS BY ONLY 3 PERCENT OF DECIDED VOTERS MAY MEAN
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THAT EVEN MODERATE QUEBECKERS ARE NOT RECEPTIVE TO TRUDEAU FEDERALIST MESSAGE AND/OR THAT FEDERAL LIBERALS ARE PAYING FOR SINS OF FORMER BOURASSA GOVERNMENT. POLL SHOULD CAUSE INCREASED LIBERAL PARTY QUESTIONING FO CONTINUED TRUDEAU LEADERSHIP AND THIS WILL GROW IF THIS POLL DOES REPRESENT A TREND. END SUMMARY.

2. GALLUP POLL RESULTS (REF A), WHICH ARE FIRST BASED ON DATA GATHERED AFTER PQ VICTORY IN QUEBEC, HAVE SURPRISED POLITICAL OBSERVERS HERE. CONVENTIONAL WISDOM FROM POLITICAL COMMENTATORS IN LAST TWO MONTHS HAS HAD IT THAT LIBERALS LIKELY TO CONTINUE CLOSING POLLING GAP WITH MEASURABLE SEGMENT OF PUBLIC TURNING TO TRUDEAU AS NATIONAL LEADER BEST EQUIPPED TO DEFEND CONFEDERATION. DOUBLING OF PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE (PC) POLLING LEAD FROM 7 TO 14 PERCENTAGE POINTS WOULD SHATTER THIS PREVAILING VIEW, IF IT PROVES TO BE PERMANENT IN NATURE. OBSERVERS, INCLUDING EMBASSY, REMAIN CAUTIOUS IN INTERPRETING NEW FIGURES, AWAITING JANUARY RESULTS TO SEE IF FIRM TREND IS IN FACT, FORMING. NONETHELESS, THIS SURPRISING SETBACK FOR LIBERALS HAS IMPORTANT IMPLICATIONS AND RAISES SEVERAL POSSIBILITIES.

3. LIBERAL POLLING ADVANCE SINCE THEIR LOW POINT LAST AUGUST WHEN THEY TRAILED PCS BY 18 PERCENTAGE POINTS HAS, OF COURSE, BEEN REVERSED. GAP WAS 12 POINTS IN SEPT, 11 IN OCT, AND 7 IN NOV. IMPORTANCE MAY BE PRIMARILY PSYCHOLOGICAL SINCE LIBERAL UPWARD MOMENTUM HAS BEEN STOPPED AND DRAMATICALLY SO.

4. DECEMBER FIGURES PROBABLY FURTHER REDUCE POSSIBILITY OF TRUDEAU CALLING A QUICK ELECTION FOR NEXT SUMMER (REF C). ONE FUNDAMENTAL PREMISE SUPPORTING THIS PROSPECT WAS CONTINUING LIBERAL GAINS IN THE POLLS.

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5. TO DATE, TRUDEAU POLICY TOWARDS THE PQ HAS BEEN ESSENTIALLY PASSIVE ON THE NOTION THAT THE PQ COULD WELL DEFEAT ITSELF. TRUDEAU HAS, HOWEVER, BEEN CONSIDERING MORE AGGRESSIVE POLICY OPTIONS, E.G., REVERSING HIS CENTRALIST CONCEPT OF FEDERALISM, AND DECEMBER POLL RESULTS SHOULD BRING CONSIDERABLE PRESSURE ON TRUDEAU FOR SOME KIND OF POLICY SHIFT.

6. PC LEADER JOE CLARK MAY BE TEMPTED TO CONTINUE PROVIDING FEW SPECIFICS TO SUPPORT HIS CLAIM THAT CENTRALIZATION CAN BEST KEEP THE COUNTRY TOGETHER. SOME CLARK ADVISERS BELIEVE THAT HE DOES BEST WHEN HE SAYS LITTLE, AND THESE ADVISERS MAY CLAIM THAT POLL RESULTS PROVIDE JUSTIFICATION FOR CONTINUED CLARK VAGUENESS. THIS COULD BE PC TACTICAL MISTAKE. THE DEC. POLL WAS COMPARISON BETWEEN POLITICAL PARTIES AND NOT PARTY LEADERS. CLARK HAS BEEN INCREASINGLY CRITICIZED FOR HIS UNWILLINGNESS TO PROVIDE ALTERNATIVE, DETAILED

POLICY AND THIS CRITICISM COULD GROW EVEN AS HIS PARTY
MAY IMPROVE IN THE POLLS.

7. RESULTS IN QUEBEC MOST SURPRISING OF ALL WITH PC
ONLY 3 POINTS BEHIND LIBERALS AMONG DECIDED VOTERS. IN
FACT, OVERALL PC GAIN ATTRIBUTABLE ALMOST ENTIRELY TO
SHIFT IN QUEBEC SINCE RELATIVE STANDINGS IN OTHER
PROVINCES REMAINED ROUGHLY THE SAME AS IN NOV. POLL.
BEGIN FYI: EMBOFF HAS OBTAINED ON CONFIDENTIAL BASIS
QUEBEC AND ONTARIO POLLING DATA. IN MONTH OF DECEMBER,
LIBERALS DROPPED 10 POINTS (52 TO 42) AMONG DECIDED
VOTERS IN QUEBEC WHILE PC GAINED 15 (24 TO 39). TOTAL
FOR "OTHER PARTIES" (LARGELY SOCIAL CREDIT) DROPPED
FROM 16 POINTS TO 11 POINTS. FORTY-SIX PERCENT OF
QUEBEC VOTERS WERE UNDECIDED, ROUGHLY THE SAME AS IN
THE LAST POLL. IN ONTARIO, LIBERALS INCREASED SUPPORT
SLIGHTLY FROM 37 TO 39 PERCENT OF DECIDED VOTERS WHILE
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PC SUPPORT FELL FROM 40 TO 39 PERCENT. END FYI. IN
EMBASSY VIEW, THIS SHIFT IN QUEBEC VOTER PREFERENCE
LIKELY REPRESENTS ANTI-TRUDEAU, ANTI-FEDERAL LIBERAL
TREND RATHER THAN INDICATION OF GROWING, SOLID SUPPORT
FOR CLARK AND THE PC. WE HAVE SEEN NO SIGNIFICANT
INDICATION OF THE LATTER FROM OTHER EVIDENCE.

8. QUEBEC RESULTS RAISE POSSIBILITY THAT TRUDEAU
FEDERALIST ARGUMENTS HAVE NOT BEEN PERSUASIVE AMONG
EVEN THOSE MODERATE QUEBECKERS WHO HAVE TO ATE SHOWN
LITTLE INTEREST IN PQ SEPARATIS PROPOSALS. THIS MAY
PROVIDE STRONG INCENTIVE FOR TRUDEAU TO SHIFT POLICY
DIRECTIONS, AS NOTED ABOVE. THERE IS, HOWEVER, ANOTHER
POSSIBLE EXPLANATION FOR THIS SWITCH AWAY FROM THE
LIBERALS. PQ IS STILL IN "HONEYMOON" PERIOD EVEN
AMONG NON-SEPARATISTS QUEBECKERS WHO REMEMBER WELL THE
INEPT, INSENSITIVE BOURASSA LIBERAL GOVERNMENT. ALTHOUGH
FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL LIBERALS ARE SEPARATE, TO A
DEGREE, THE DISTINCTION CAN BECOME BLURRED AND THE
TRUDEAU GOVERNMENT MAY BE PAYING SOME PRICE FOR
BOURASSA GOVERNMENT SINS. THIS BLURRED DISTINCTION
ALL THE MORE LIKELY IN VIEW OF FEDERAL LIBERALS' OWN
RECORD OF BUMBLING AND INSENSITIVITY OVER PAST YEAR.

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9. THERE ARE FIVE VACANT FEDERAL SEATS IN QUEBEC AND
FOUR WERE LIBERAL (THE OTHER WAS SOCIAL CREDIT).
ALTHOUGH PC ORGANIZERS TOLD EMBOFFS CANDIDLY IN DECEMBER
THAT THE PC WOULD BE LUCKY TO WIN EVEN ONE SEAT, APPARENT
ANTI-LIBERAL SENTIMENT IN QUEBEC MUST HAVE LIBERALS
WORRIED. LIBERAL BACKBENCHER SUGGESTED TO EMBOFF
POSSIBILITY THAT PQ, TO EMBARRASS THE FEDERAL
LIBERALS, MIGHT QUIETLY RALLY SUPPORT AGAINST LIBERAL
CANDIDATES AND FOR STRONGEST OPPONENT, PC OR INDEPENDENT.
ALTHOUGH LIBERALS AT THIS POINT MUST BE OUNTED AS
FAVORED TO WIN THE SEATS THEY HELD, THESE SEATS APPEAR
FAR LESS SAFE THAN THEY DID SEVERAL MONTHS AGO.

10. FINALLY, THE ABRUPT REVERSAL -- IF IT HOLDS --
OF LIBERAL POLLING FORTUNES WILL INTENSIFY QUESTIONING
IN LIBERAL PARTY OF CONTINUED TRUDEAU LEADERSHIP.
DISSENTION GREW OVER THE PAST YEAR WHEN LIBERAL STAND-
INGS IN THE POLLS WENT FROM BAD TO WORSE (IN AUGUST)
AND IT EVEN CONTINUED TO GROW DURING THE UPSWING SINCE
AUGUST. PQ VICTORY QUIETED AT LEAST SOME OF THE MORE
VOCAL ANTI-TRUDEAU SENTIMENT AS PARTY MEMBERS GENERALLY
RALLIED BEHIND THEIR LEADER, WHO WAS PURPORTEDLY THE
NATIONAL FIGURE MOST CAPABLE OF KEEPING THE COUNTRY
TOGETHER. WITH DECEMBER POLL, WE EXPECT THAT DISSIDENTS
WILL NOW REDOUBLE THEIR EFFORTS AND, IF LIBERAL DOWN-
SWING CONTINUES, MORE ORGANIZED EFFORTS WILL BE
LAUNCHED TO FORCE TRUDEAU OUT.
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